



*Sheppard  
Pratt*

# *The Frontline Supervisor*

*Helping You Manage Your Company's  
Most Valuable Resource - Employees*

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◆ Several employees are refusing to work because they believe an injured coworker on light duty is “faking it.” They refuse to do his work, but this is customary in our industry. Obviously, they do not have personal problems, so there is no role for the EAP, correct?

Employees may be upset over a coworker’s temporary inability to work, particularly if they must perform the duties of the injured coworker. Refusal to work, however, is an administrative concern. This behavior makes the referral to the EAP appropriate. The EAP may be helpful in several ways: (1) resolving relationship issues that may have preceded and contributed to the negative reaction of the coworkers toward the injured worker, (2) dealing with personal problems of individual employees that contribute to or further explain the refusal-to-work behavior, and (3) helping employees understand that a truly injured worker may not appear obviously impaired. It is not unusual for an injured coworker with a bona fide medical restriction to risk further injury at home or in recreational pursuits. Unfortunately, coworkers who discover this may see it as proof that the employee isn’t really injured, adding to the conflicts seen in the workplace.

◆ My employee made a statement in a discussion that caused me concern over whether he could be violent. He said, “You better keep the pressure off me before I pop.” I wouldn’t be concerned if another employee had made this statement. Should I ignore it?

You should not ignore the statement, but consider how to respond to it. You appear to have concerns about your employee that precede him making this statement. A discussion with your next-level supervisor and asking for an EAP consult would therefore be appropriate. Such discussions could help provide a safeguard that you will respond properly. If your organization has a policy on workplace violence, review it for guidance. Asking your employee what he means when he says “before I pop” is important. You should express your concern about his choice of words and their meaning. His answer may indicate the level of stress he is under. Recommending the EAP would then be appropriate. Research on violence in the workplace often discusses warning signs as subtle as the statement made by this employee. In the past, coworkers and supervisors dismissed or ignored such statements, because they denied that violent acts were possible.

◆ My employee informed me that she couldn’t come to work in the morning because she has a self-referred appointment with the EAP. Can I ask the EAP to change her appointment? The appointment interferes with a heavy workload that day. Can I ask her to change it?

You should not call the EAP to discuss her appointment time. The EAP would not be able to confirm or deny such an appointment. Instead, check the EAP policy or ask the EAP about the supervisor’s role in approving self-referred appointments during the workday in your organization. At the employee’s request, the EAP could adjust her appointment time to accommodate off-duty hours, or perhaps see her during a lunch break. EAP appointments are given with the assumption that employees have made proper arrangements if they occur during the workday. Be careful not to become frustrated with the EAP, believing it is interfering with your work unit. Typically, supervisor referrals may be on company time. Self-referrals, however, when requested by employees during work hours, are usually with the approval of the supervisor and the leave policy guidelines.

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◆ I have an employee who was caught stealing. When I proposed termination he became extremely remorseful. He begged for his job and says he has financial problems and two small children. I feel bad and don't know what to do. How do I handle this situation?

Most employers consider stealing a profound offense and will consider termination in response to it. Refer your employee to the EAP regardless of the decision you make. Consider using the EAP for support with the emotional aspects of your decision. There are many motives for stealing by employees. Some of these are based upon personal problems such as compulsive gambling or a drug addiction. But others are crimes of opportunity supported by a distorted rationale to assuage guilt. For example, an industrial tool shed routinely left unlocked will have more tools stolen from it, by more people, than a tool shed with the cheapest of locks. Other organizational factors can also influence stealing. Be sure to examine what these factors are in your work environment to reduce future occurrences, regardless of your decision in this case.

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◆ I referred an employee to the EAP three years ago. He went, but his performance problems remained. I've tolerated the problems since, but an incident that caused some embarrassment to our department is causing me to consider dismissal. Is there any point to using the EAP now?

After referring your employee to the EAP, you continued to tacitly accept substandard performance because you did not act to intervene with the problems that remained. Your employee must own the consequences of failing to provide satisfactory job performance, but he may have been influenced by this false perception of approval. After a significant incident associated with performance, employees are typically motivated to make changes in their performance while readily accepting EAP recommendations. This is a good reason to try another supervisor referral. The length of time since the last referral also supports this action. Be clear about the standard of performance required of your employee, and establish a follow-up plan. Contract with your employee for satisfactory performance, and then act in response to performance that remains poor.

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### **Notes:**

***This information is intended only for the employees of your company. Please do not post it on a website that is accessible by the general public or by your company's clients.***

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